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The prized pole dancer: Interview with Natasha Wang

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As the 2011 USPDF National Champion, Natasha Wang has captivated audiences around the globe drawing unexpected emotion from crowds with her richly intricate pole performances. I was honored to speak with Ms. Wang as she wrapped up her X-Pole European Tour and received some insight into this talented pole dancer's life. A true professional with quite the fun-loving side, this Texas native is taking the pole world by storm.

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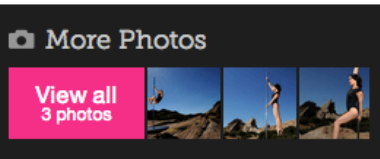
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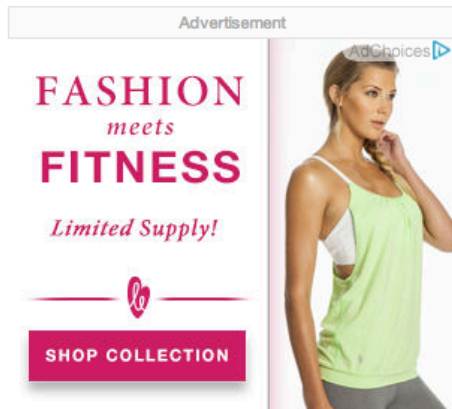
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First thing's first - how did you get into pole dancing?

Wang: A friend saw Sheila Kelley's S Factor on Oprah and insisted I join her in a teaser class at the Los Angeles studio. This was back in 2004 or so, before pole dancing had really hit the mainstream in the U.S. I stuck with classes once a week for about 4 ½ years before I joined my then-instructor Andrea Frankovich at her studio Pole Garage as I'd essentially learned every move in the S Factor handbook a dozen times over! When I started training at Be Spun, that's when the real insanity of training for several hours a day started.

Pole Dancing • Natasha • Wang
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Your winning performance at the 2011 USPDF National Championships seemed to have been inspired by Black Swan. What or who else inspires you when it comes to performing?

Wang: It was absolutely inspired by Black Swan. The movie was the backbone for the entire routine! I like infusing pole dancing with storytelling. I've always been a writer and was very active in writing groups, poetry readings and writing retreats before pole took over. So now instead of telling stories with my writing, I do it in my dancing.

What do you hope people take away from your performances?

Wang: I want them to be moved.

You wear many hats including being the principal dancer with the Girl Next Door group and now as an official X-Pole Girl. Is there one achievement you are most proud of?

Wang: I'm proud that I had the guts to actually follow my dream. Three months ago, I was a publicist. I'd held the same job for nine years. I loved my job, but the best part of the day was when I was at the studio with my pole peeps.

It's still surreal to call pole my career. I've become one of those disgusting people who wakes up every day ecstatic and looking forward to the day. My god, how I used to hate those people!

What are your pole dancing goals? And have you ever considered opening a studio of your own or doing a line of instructional videos?

Wang: Despite winning the U.S. title, I'm still a relative nube on the international stage. I plan to compete in my first international competition this March in Hong Kong. I'm not expecting to win, but I'll be honored to hold my own against some of the world's best. As far as instructional videos are concerned, I'm open to the possibility but I don't want it to be just another series of tricks and combos – it needs to offer something different. I have a few ideas percolating.

You are in amazing shape! Is it all from pole or do you take part in any other fitness programs?

Wang: It's primarily pole, but I try to cross-train with yoga, pilates, ballet barre, Chinese pole and contortion classes.

What's the most difficult trick you've learned – anything that took particularly longer than others to grasp?

Wang: My Chinese pole instructors Steve Gale and Timber Brown taught me the fonji last year – it's a rapid-fire transition from a shoulder mount to a flag/brass monkey invert. Despite having done this trick already for a year, I'm only just now kicking the move up a notch by attempting to transition back to the shoulder mount. It's *almost* there.

Pole dancing is slowly moving away from the stripper stigma. Do you think it will ever be fully accepted as a sport and legitimate form of fitness?

Wang: Absolutely. We're well on our way there.

Are you on the 'pole dancing as an Olympic sport' bandwagon?

Wang: To be perfectly honest, I don't think it's ready yet. Let's wait a few years for the public's perception of the sport to change. I am, however, 100% on the 'pole dancing as an X-Games sport' bandwagon.

Recently, Living Social came out with a study that revealed more Americans purchased pole dancing lessons than gym passes. What's your take on this?

Wang: I'm not surprised! There's no other form of fitness I've done that is as intense, fun and social than pole dancing.

Having judged competitions before, what are some common trends you see in the winners and what do you look for in a winning performance?

Wang: I look for an emotional connection with the music, passion in the performer's movement, a willingness to bare one's soul and a performer who has a clearly defined sense of style. I also appreciate it when a performer isn't afraid to be different.

I'm also a stickler for feet—toes should always be pointed!

You will be one of the prestigious judges for the upcoming Miss Texas Pole Star 2011 Competition. What advice do you have for those competitors?

Wang: Map out your training regimen and establish benchmarks for what pole routine goals you want to achieve when. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Know your routine so well that it becomes an integral part of you – that's when you're at a point when you can just focus on adding in the emotion, character and passion into your dance.

My friend Amber Richard (USPDF West Coast Champ 2009) gave me a fantastic piece of advice. Every time you go out on stage, remind yourself that *you're doing what you love*. I'd add that you

should never forget how lucky you are to inhabit a healthy body that can do incredible things – think about those who aren't as fortunate.

Do you have any advice for people just getting into pole fitness?

Wang: Find a reputable instructor who is going to inspire you and make your workout fun and safe.

What songs are in your pole dance playlist right now?

Wang: “Plaything” by Wild Beasts - “This is the Dream of Win and Regine” by Final Fantasy - “Twilight” by Antony & The Johnsons - “I Can’t Make You Love Me” by Bon Iver - “Twice” by Little Dragon

What are some items in your purse that you never leave home without?

Wang: Wallet, red lipstick, iPhone, iPod Shuffle, spare pair of pole shoes and sports bra, grip aids (iTac2 and Dew Point), and a book (currently C by Thomas McCarthy).

Heels or no heels?

Wang: No heels.

Any guilty pleasures?

Wang: Cheese. French brie and St. Marcelin, Norwegian Ski Queen, Greek feta, Italian mozzarella . . . I am a cheese whore!

For more information on Natasha Wang and to see if she will be visiting your town next, log on to her [website](#). Natasha will be traveling back to her home state of Texas soon—catch her at the upcoming [Miss Texas Pole Star Competition](#) on September 16 at the Lizard Lounge in Dallas, Texas where she will be judging and making a special performance.

Suggested by the author

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